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PRELUDE

MARGUERITE
HOPE
BENNETT

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PRELUDE

A Book of Verse

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BY

MARGUERITE HOPE BENNETT

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To these
young, fair, passing days
of mine

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YOUTH

Like lilac sprays,—
Faint, mystic, fragrant,—
Mauve tinted as the hours of dawn.

WAITING

The moon-white petals tinged with the blush of life,
Flutter to earth with a sigh,
The ceaseless water flows to eternity on the path of a moonbeam.
The soft dove mourns in the poplar tree
And the willows weep in the shadowed water.
And I,—
I wait for a golden song!

ENCHANTMENT

O there I see them now
Lights fainting through the trees
Like wavering stars at night.
What are they, mother dear,

And whose are they, for I
Want to hold them?
Tell me, please!

"The lights, my sweet, are wraiths
Of the ever star-ward surging,
And you will see them always,
You of the warm and wondering soul."

CATHERINE DANCED

A low awakening note of Gluck
Through twilight woods——
And from the draperies mystic gray,
—Beauty—
In that veiled figure,
Essence of the afterglow,—
Gold-dipped trees,
Dark against a flaming sky,
Flashes of belated butterflies,
Deep pools,
Haunted with crimson and with gold.

ONE DAY

The world was a dream of blue and gold,—
For gold were the trees
Whose branches flaunted their leafiness
To the gentian-blooming sky,
And the mountains were blue
As fairy flax
Above the grain-ripe fields.

AUTUMN

The blue-shadowed mountains,
The tender veiled sky,
The mellow scented fruit,
Rich and ripe in its maturity,
And the migrating birds
Black against an evening sky.

NIGHTFALL

And the dark star, Night,
Fell from the wide-spread dusk of sky
Through the lilac mists of twilight,
Dyeing the sunset's gold
To the deep blue
Which became her best.

LONGING

When the world was a summer garden
I sighed for thee,
Oh time of fruitful maturity!
When the golden bees from the milk-white phlox
Their limpid sweetness drew,
I longed for the vagrant birds.

When the fragrance of summer sweetened the drifting air
The heart of me yearned
For October's fulfillment
Of April's uncertain intimations
And rain-drenched promises.

THE STORM

I gazed at the autumnal landscape,
And in my heart I felt that the golden days were come;
When, out of the azure sky,
As swift as falls the twilight,
The gray mists enveloped the blue mountain range,
The fields of golden grain were hid,
And the sun shone no more.

PRELUDE

The wind rode high and swift,
The earth was wan with darkness,
And the great drops of rain
Fell as a shower of diamonds
From the crown of the storm queen,
Who followed fast in the wake
Of her heralds dire.

UNVEILED

And I saw in my vision
Our black death unveiled,
And lo! she was a lady of perfect beauty,
    Garbed in fine gray,
    The hue that heralds the dawn;
    And it was she that guarded
    The gates of paradise.
And it was through her that Life Everlasting
        was won,
    As through the dawn
    The day is reached.

REFLECTED

Coral hue
And dusky midnight
In perfect harmony:
One tiny plant-bug
By creative nature perfected.

The cloud islands float
In the sea-blue sky,
Like swans on a reflecting lake

MOMENTS

The night grows dark,
The trees sob wearily
In the languid air;
The glow of a star
Shines, and is gone;
The rain falls hard.
I gaze into my heart;
The desolate confusion
Has no gleam of light,—
Love is gone!

PRELUDE

There is no enduring joy in me,
Life as a shattered crystal vase
Shows only fitful gleams
From broken happiness!

My eyes grow dull to beauty
And my starved heart breaks;
Strange thoughts come seeking me,—
Ghosts of this very day
Stalking toward the tents of night!

The cool of the evening;
Deepening shadows;
A star flaming bright,—
I think of God!

Day is near!
And the lilac wide-flung cloud of dawn
With a faint edge, arbutus tinged,
Veils the form of coming day!

A butterfly fluttered past,—
The heart in me was changed,—
I saw the outlined meadows faint with violets,
And bleak woods sheathed in living green:
I heard praises in soft rustlings.

PRELUDE

Over the passive earth
A shadow broods,
And on the wings of air
Night comes down.

Your message came to-night
It sifted thru the moonbeams
On the starlit way
And brought your love to my heart.

Fields wide-flung, blank with snow,—
Cold-sharpened branches
Stabbing a bleak sky to crimson.

OSTEND

A stretch of sand
Impinging on a sapphire sea,—
A moving crowd,
Topped by vivid flames of tilting sunshades.

IN MAY

When lilacs were in bloom
The perfume faintly
Blew thru budding trees,
Tinting the warm air

With the color of Spring,
And making the dreams
Of silver May!

YOU CAME

Across the twilight fields,
In the evening calm,
Like the first star,—
You!
Warm as a glowing heart,
Mystic as the asphodel
On the plains of Death;
Beautiful with the love
Emburned by suffering,
More on the soul than on the heart.

And through the starlit evening,
You, with the shadows
Of dreams ever present
In your deep eyes,
Like reflections of willow branches
In the clear waters of a shimmering lake.

A DREAM OF LIÉGE

I see the glory that rises
From shattered pinnacles,
Like the Phœnix
Crumbled to dust,
Revived by the spark immortal
Of the unfailing beauty in life,
Rises again fairer and brighter than before.

THE ANSWER

And one bright star,
Gold glimmering
Sprang through the mountain dusk,—
Into the sky depths beyond.
A wish I sent.
Back to me the desire flamed,
But not one hope of fulfillment.

HAPPINESS

The world is bright,— the sun glows with your love!
The leaves whisper tenderly.
From the heavens I turn my eyes to earth;

At my feet a tiny beetle lies dead,—
O! will your love, so great and lovely a thing,
Die as this small beetle,—
Change from thrilling life to death?

RHEIMS

And before us as we gazed
Gloom-shrouded Rheims appeared;
    We saw ruins;
The beauty of the undemolished church
Was a deep wound in the heart,
    The phantom of a dream.

WESTWARD

And you've gone West, my boy,
Through the portals of the sunset,
At the bidding of the shrapnel,
For liberty and peace!
You've gone West, my boy,
And in our souls
We kneel!

THE GRAVE OF MY HEART

A star flamed out
Over a cross,
White-gleaming
Against the stretch
Of war-swept waste,—
Marking the plot
In that vast desert
Where my heart lies dead. . . .

AS THEY PASS

A smile-lit face,
A light kiss gaily tossed,
And a Poilu has passed!
A buoyant phrase
And a ringing snatch of a song;
A Tommy's near you now!
A countenance
Darkened with mysterious memories,
The silent Indian stands.
A friendly grin
From Canada's man,
Who swings by strong and free!

And last of all
The man of the hour: the one hope,—
Strong, grim and purposeful!

IN THE NIGHT

Forms passing in the night,
Brooding stillness;
Darkness!
Measured, tramping footfalls
On the hardened roads of France:
Tramp, tramp with buoyant stride;
Tired, weighted steps returning;
Passing in the night!

DEATH

The moon lies low in a dark sky,
The air is scented with box-hedge greens and a falling rose.
Pierrot comes in grief, with faltering step;
He bears the fragile figure of his beloved, mystic in blue and lilac with the crushed poppy tints in her hair:
His loved one is dead. Poor lonely Pierrot!
Will springtime ever awake again in his soul?

THE SACRIFICE

White hands
I loved so well,
Pure, fair and wondrous smooth;
Hands, whose tender touch on my dead brow,
Would make the blood surge through
My veins once more!

These hands are yours, my dearest. It is hard to leave you! You are my inspiration, the light of this soul, setting out now on a shoreless sea that were despair, but for your blessed hands. Your hands are for such work as saving souls. They are too fair to be soiled by life's endless toils. . . . May they never touch life's grime!

My country calls. From you, I draw strength for the good that is in me. I go to do my part, dear. Pray for me.

Yes, my darling. It is over. My part has helped, and I rejoice. Ah! but why do you cover those fair hands from the eyes whose light they are? And still you veil them! Let me slip the white gloves off and bring to light that dearest of perfections.

You say that through them you have done your part —What?—Munitions!—

Oh! white, white soul! Oh! greatest of sacrifices!

Weary hands
I worship to the end,—
Pure, blessed and gloriously worn!
Hands, whose deep sacrifice burned on my soul,
Lead me on through the Gates of Gold!

THE TRUTH

We lay in the trench looking at the blue sky while the soft spring breeze blew over us with thrilling freshness. We sighed unconsciously for bird songs; but No Man's Land is without melody.

Were we dreaming? Surely we were hearing a song. . . . It rang out glad and free, and we who listened knew, with the first notes, God and the unconquerable soul. That stirring voice held us under a spell. It ceased as suddenly as it had begun, and we were quiet with a new experience of breathless stillness.

Then with one accord from silence we broke into ringing, loud applause. We contrived to send a message into that Saxon trench, begging the man with the divine gift, to come out and sing to us again. We would not shoot!

So each morning for many a day he sang, and we lived, it seemed, upon his voice.

One night orders came to vacate our trench as soon

as possible. In the excitement and hurry of departure we could not notify our successors of the Saxon's morning song.

We heard about it afterwards.

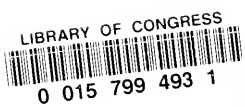
At dawn he rose from the enemy trench to sing. A shot rang through the stillness. He fell dead.

His fellow-men think and say, "Treachery!" But he knows the truth. And we, we cannot forget!

UNDERSTANDING

The wide world is between us,
We speak in different tongues,
Strange seas and unknown lands
We must cross, defying death;
But in the clear-swept dawn
We shall meet and know!

THE END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